

## **Remote Learning Task Force Expert Advisory Panel 2: Support to Address the Whole Child Experience, Minutes, 8/4/20**

Attendance: Lindsay Fallon, Hiroko Aspi, Sanjli Gidwaney, Bryan Agurcia, Amanda Tarullo, Beth Jones, Amanda Grindstaff, Ellen Lenocho, Lauren Bernard, Mariah Nobrega, Susan Ditzkoff, Maria Letasz, Liz Gorman

Approval of Minutes: Lindsay, Hiroko, Bryan, Amanda T., Amanda G., Beth, Ellen

Prepared by Hiroko Aspi

Social Emotional Learning/Wellness Grades 6-12

Presenters: Amanda Grindstaff, Beth Jones

### **Presentation:**

#### **Beth Jones:**

##### Reinstating the wellness coordinator should be the district's top priority.

- It is imperative that the position of wellness coordinator at the district level be reinstated, as have a wellness coordinator is essential to a comprehensive commitment to SEW/SEL curricula and to a unified vision for SEL.
- Brookline cares about academic achievement but currently doesn't promote SEW/SEL as a curriculum.
- Although a lot of SEW/SEL programs exist across grades, there is no cohesive plan.
- The universal plans should be flexible with sites and facilities because physical space is different.
- Schools should allocate time to teach SEL with a curriculum.
- In parallel to the recommendations for K-5, upper grades need built-in time and structure to facilitate better support, timely communication and collaboration.

##### SEL tools work only if they are practiced.

- 20% of the children sought support last year. This number will increase this year.
- Adults need to learn the tools and practice them in order to teach older children.
- Teaching the tools is important but not effective unless they are practiced.
- There is no guarantee that students would adopt the tools, but adults can offer ongoing support to encourage regular practice.
- Relaxed students and teachers will be more prepared to learn.
- Innovation Fund discontinued funding a mindfulness program at BHS. Such programs can be adapted by lower grades. Content teachers need to be brought into the loop.
- Leverage existing resources. Find content teachers (including OTs, PTs, etc.) who have received grants for mindfulness programs and build on them.
- Content for younger children includes standard breathing technique, basic yoga, games, visualization, gratitude exercises, etc.

### SEL's goal is building resilience.

- Older children should learn to understand basic physiology, identify stressors, cognitive distortion, positive psychology as components of health and recognize the continuum of small to big problems.
- High schoolers should learn how to talk about resilience and age applicable SEL skills.
- While younger grades learn how to dysregulate themselves at various times, older students need to learn to adapt well in face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant stress. They should build a long term process to understand their relationship to the world and how resilience can come to play.

### **Amanda Grindstaff:**

#### Focusing on emotional health of everybody

Unlike other times, all of us are experiencing the effects of covid-19 and managing changes. SEL/mental health/mindfulness/selfcare/resilience have to do with our ability to manage, regulate and care for oneself to be successful, happy and productive.

#### Mental fitness

- Stigma and negative connotation are associated with mental health. While the gamut of physical fitness exists, a workout for mental fitness is largely overlooked.
- Upper grade students should learn and change the mindset, process learning goals and routines to make mental fitness stronger and understand the impact of practicing.

#### Elements of mental fitness

Strength - how we can handle heavy stress

Mental Endurance - withstand prolonged stress

Flexibility - use right tools and switch techniques depending on situation

Team - go to different coaches (adults in community, counsellors, parents, teams trainers, etc)

#### Mental fitness should be part of school culture.

##### Existing effort

- Compile a list of people (not just health teachers) who are already doing mental fitness programs. Insead of reinventing the wheels, we should tweak them to fit the current and long-term needs.
- These programs should be all-encompassing across the board and be embedded in school culture.

##### Tools and workouts

- Students can workout optimism, mindfulness, gratitude, reframing, perspective and rethink about the way they are thinking. Gratitude journal is an example.
- Identify similar problems and priorities for all parties (teachers, students, staff) and make mental fitness check-ins as part of everyday routine and not a unit taught once a year.

- Offer events to promote mental wellness for staff and students. Adults and students can do things together to retain and embed the process.

### Teacher and community connection

Ideas for teacher wellness which can bring teachers together

- Clubs (knitting, yoga, running, cooking)
- Events (staff run, potluck, first Fridays)
- Offerings, yoga, mindfulness, gratitude wall
- Community action events (park clean up, making food for senior homes)
- Make the staff room engaging to destress in a playful way. Staff room makeovers like corporations may include a ping pong table, fitness room, stress reducing activities, etc.
- Wellness teachers (Liz Gorman, Billy Graham, etc.) can lead yoga and mindfulness (e.g., morning zoom yoga for teachers).
- The district can offer weekend workshops.
- How can this be built into the schedule? During the day? Before or after school? Zoom live?

### Teacher wellness

- Schools need to know how teachers are doing before knowing how students are doing.
- The district should regularly offer more SEL for teachers (e.g., weekend workshops, mental fitness for teachers).
- Teachers need to make regular check-ins for themselves a routine before taking care of students.

### How can PTOs help?

- Organize meetings for parents to bridge gaps between schools and homes, share concerns and problem solve, give parents tools how to support at home. If children are getting consistent messages from all parties, it'll be powerful.
- Fund mental fitness offering for staff and students. Every school can share a comprehensive list of ways students can be engaged outside school.
- Provide age specific ways to make playdates, numbers bingo, scavenger hunt, etc. Can the PTOs set up weekly zoom playdates?

### **Liz Gorman:**

Not having a coordinator, it's hard to have a vision. The position wasn't eliminated by default because it was an interim position, not intentional, hard time to find funds. We need leadership. Mentioned K-8 guidance and mental health website, SEL district website as resources.

- What would SEL look like at school? What is our vision? We have the structure to learn about mental fitness.
- Small moments can be built in (e.g., math teacher practicing breathing) and students can start to build up.
- When teachers are forced to teach when they are not practicing, it wouldn't work. The opposite is also true.
- We can't underestimate the power of working with adults. Children look up at adults.

Discussion:

**Amanda G**

Talked about a 1½ min video of a child sitting in front of zoom, burned out.

Older adolescents are missing socialization.

We need to train the brain to manage emotional regulation.

It's somewhat easier to assist younger children with emotional regulation. She would love teachers to think about things to unplug for older children. Being fully remote doesn't mean children couldn't facilitate physical live human interactions outside.

**Beth**

- A lot of educators have done resilience and mindfulness training. Can we have a list of teachers who have learned the tools? Can they spread the tools?
- BEF could provide info on who's got grants.
- Students with IEP will have less support in the remote environment.
- Can voluntary retreats for teachers happen as a piece of training at the beginning of school?

**Sanji**

Is there a staff survey? Can they survey? She's worried about teachers' mental health.

**Maria**

On staff survey - excited that social emotional screening for teachers is included in the universal screening. They are working on it now. They'll be able to check in with staff what their needs are. It's about community building, do it in different ways. Instead of self care, staff should connect with each other, bond and share the ability to know that others are experiencing similar challenges.

**Beth**

Who's included in "staff"?

**Maria**

Everyone - all staff of different capacity including para-professionals, nurses, custodians who will have heavier load, people who populate the building.

**Liz**

Teacher's time is very tight. When SEL is on top of everything else, it won't work. It needs to be built into the day. Otherwise, administrators and counselors can't attend.

**Connie Clausen** (community member)

Talked about 3 points based on experience on mental health issues.

1. Teacher support programs existed in neighboring areas even before the pandemic. Their overwhelming priority is to support staff - clinicians supporting staff with benefit being children. Brookline needs to change thinking and elevate staff support.

2. Sense of belonging is important for 6-12 grades. A welcome banner on the first day of school tells them “you belong, you are welcome here”. Belonging means different things to children, but if they feel they don’t belong, we’ll lose them.

3. Do not underestimate the power of social media. It’s hard to monitor, but connecting with others can provide effective support and emphasize belonging.

**Liz**

Students and teachers have real academic concerns, More is not necessarily good, too many zooms become too many zooms.

**Beth**

Doesn’t want high school to be an objective lesson. SEL should've been already there. There is a sense of urgency. Hope this happens quickly because we don’t have much time.

**Amanda G**

Hate to see the hybrid or remote focus on academic pieces. Smart students are having mental health issues.

**Ellen Leno**

Hope there’s a way to incorporate extended day staff and wants to be part of the discussion. Hope extended day staff can play a role.

**Liz**

How can this discussion be materialized?

**Susan**

SC will have access to the presentations and panel’s recommendations are shared among SC members. One pager with bullets is provided to communicate messages. A written summary goes to the superintendent. SC is absorbing ideas and kneading it back to the dough.

**Key Points & Recommendations**

**Reinstating the wellness coordinator is essential.** Only with this district level position can a cohesive vision of socioemotional learning (SEL) be implemented in Brookline schools. This position is needed for a comprehensive commitment to SEL/SEW, which is more critical than ever at this time.

**Developing a universal SEL curriculum with dedicated teaching time, and training all teachers in mindfulness and SEL are critical steps.** OT and PT teachers who have already been trained in mindfulness are a great resource to help bring content teachers into the loop.

**SEL in 6-12 students should include** identifying stressors, understanding cognitive distortion, positive psychology, strategies for adapting in the face of adversity, and learning about resilience and underlying physiology of stress and coping. SEL builds resilience.

**Support for teacher wellness** is essential to prevent burnout. It would be helpful for the district to offer weekend workshops for teachers and opportunities for yoga, guided mindfulness, community action events, and clubs or virtual potlucks for bonding and mutual support. Teachers need to regularly check in on their own well being, not just their students.'

**PTO's can help promote socioemotional wellness** by organizing meetings to bridge school-home gaps, funding socioemotional wellness trainings and events for staff and students, and hosting activities to foster connection like weekly zoom playdates.